

Message Text

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ACTION AF-04

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 EUR-10 NSC-07 NSCE-00 PM-03 SP-01

CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 RSC-01 PRS-01 DODE-00 SAJ-01

DRC-01 /054 W

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R 221704Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8566

AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABIDJAN 4043

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS

SUBJECT: FRENCH HINTS AT U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN NIGER COUP

PASS DIA

1. DURING CALL LAST WEEK ON BELGIAN AMBASSADOR (WHO IS ALSO ACCREDITED TO NIAMEY), HE SHOWED ME DESPATCH FROM BELGIAN EMBASSY PARIS CITING CONVERSATIONS WITH FRENCH OFFICIALS IN WHICH REFERENCE IS MADE TO "BIZARRE BEHAVIOR" IN NIAMEY OF DATT/ARMA COLONEL RAYBURN L. SMITH, JR., SHORTLY BEFORE COUP D'ETAT LAST MONTH IMPLYING COL. SMITH'S COMPLICITY IN COUP. BELGIAN MESSAGE MERELY REPORTS FRENCH COMMENT WITHOUT GIVING IT CREDENCE OR REJECTING IT. BELGIAN AMBASSADOR'S OWN VIEW IS THAT FRENCH (AND AMERICANS) NOT RPT NOT INVOLVED IN COUP, BUT THAT FRENCH WERE TOO SLOW TO RESPOND TO IT BECAUSE OF LACK OF FRENCH LEADERSHIP BOTH IN PARIS AND NIAMEY AT THE TIME.

2. BECAUSE OF THIS INDICATION OF FRENCH EFFORTS TO IMPLICATE U.S. IN THE COUP, I HAVE DISCUSSED WITH COLONEL SMITH IN DETAIL HIS NIAMEY TRIP OF APRIL 7-9, WHICH ENDED FIVE DAYS BEFORE COUP. HE REPORTED ON TRIP SEPARATELY TO DOD ON MAY 6. HERewith
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A CAPSULE VERSION OF HIS REPORT AND COMMENTS.

3. DATT/ARMA VISITED NIAMEY 7-9 APRIL. ON 8 APRIL HE MADE CALLS ON DIRECTOR OF CABINET, MIN OF DEFENSE AND ARMED FORCES CHIEF OF STAFF. HE ATTEMPTED, BUT FAILED, TO SEE AIR FORCE COMMANDER (FRENCH), DEPUTY AIR FORCE COMMANDER (NIGERIEN), ARMORED COMPANY COMMANDER, AND GENDARMERIE COMMANDER. HE HAD CHANCE MEETING IN HOTEL BAR WITH REPUBLICAN GUARD COMMANDER. HE DINED AT RESIDENCE OF U.S. CHARGE WITH FRENCH MIL ATTACHE AND WIFE. HIS ACTION AND CONTACTS WHILE IN NIAMEY WERE ROUTINE AND IN NO WAY CLANDESTINE. HE MADE NO CONTACT WITH COMMANDER OF FRENCH ARMORED SQUADRON BASED IN NIAMEY.

4. ON 1 MAY AFTER READING PRESS REPORTS OF RECALL OF FRENCH ARMORED SQUADRON COMMANDER, AND HIS PRESENCE IN ABIDJAN, DATT ASKED FRENCH REGIMENT COMMANDER (ABIDJAN) AND FRENCH MILITARY ATTACHE FOR PERMISSION TO SEE COMMANDER, BUT BOTH FRENCH OFFICERS REFUSED TO DISCUSS THE INCIDENT AND FAILED TO ALLOW CONTACT.

5. DATT/ARMA COMMENT: IT IS POSSIBLE THAT FRENCH ARE LOOKING FOR SCAPEGOAT. IT ALSO POSSIBLE THAT MY RATHER PERSISTENT INQUIRIES ABOUT FORMER COMMANDER OF FRENCH NIAMEY UNIT AROUSED SUSPICIONS.

6. AMBASSADOR'S COMMENT: I AM SATISFIED THAT THERE IS NO BASIS IN FACT FOR FRENCH IMPLICATION OF COL. SMITH'S INVOLVEMENT. HE WAS FOLLOWING HIS NORMAL COURSE OF VISIT IN NIAMEY AND NATURAL FOLLOW-UP HERE. NEVERTHELESS, I CONSIDER IT IMPORTANT FOR NIAMEY IN PARTICULAR TO BE AWARE OF POSSIBLE FRENCH EFFORT TO PIN TAIL ON U.S. DONKEY. I HAVE SHOWN THIS MESSAGE TO DATT/ARMA.
SMITH

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